

Review of: "Exploring the Relationship Between Gender and Sustainable Development Competencies in Higher Education Institutions: Insights from a Zimbabwean University"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

This is a case study, conducted in the University in Zimbabwe, to look into the issue of gender disparity in the context of representation of female academics in positions of authority, teaching, research, governance etc. The study finds evidence of gender discrimination in many respects. The topic is an important one, but there are several problems in this study.

Comments

1. The scenario portrayed is specific to the University of Zimbabwe. With a sample size of only 43 no robust inferences can be drawn and one cannot possibly generalize the results for policy formulation at a broader level. As rightly pointed out under 'Areas for Further Research', different higher learning institutions in Zimbabwe may have different scenarios and ways of dealing with gender issues. Therefore, to be able to recommend policies at the national/ global level, conducting a more comprehensive study involving other institutions and a much larger sample size are essential.
2. If out of 43 samples 17% are women, this means there are 8 women in the sample. So, according to Table 1, all 8 women (that is, 100%) are holding senior positions, whereas out of the 75% men (that is, 32 men), only 21 (that is, 66% of the 32 men) are holding senior positions. From these data I do not see any evidence of gender discrimination against women.
3. Page 10: '82% of the respondents say that most programmes in the university are generally silent pertaining to gender', which means that the programmes are gender neutral. I see no problem here. Segregation of male and female students by particular subjects does not necessarily mean gender discrimination, unless the male and female students are forced to take up certain subjects based on gender.
4. I do not quite understand the logic in the following sentence: "It was disturbing to find out that the two female academics were grooming male academics instead of their female counterparts. A disconcerting revelation emerged that these two female academics were predominantly mentoring their male counterparts, rather than collaborating with their female colleagues." I do not find anything disturbing here. Are the female academics supposed to mentor only female students or collaborate with incompetent female colleagues even when they can do better research in collaboration with the male counterparts?
5. If females are denied access to certain facilities at the higher education level because of incompetence, then the onus is not on the University. It is the education system at a much lower level and the social and cultural environment that

are at fault. Discrimination from childhood deprives women from getting equal opportunities as their male counterparts and this culminates in incompetence. So, to give women equal opportunity, policy must focus not on higher education level, but on lower education level, so that women can become equally able as men.

6. As found in several studies, there does exist discrimination against women in various aspects all over the world. But this particular study fails to explicitly bring out the issue of discrimination against women convincingly.